The Commercial Appeal, Memphis, Wednesday, November 15, 1978

# Author's Claim Of 'Silenced' Witness Disputed

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From The Commercial Appeal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Grace Walden, a former Tennessee mental patient, was not hospitalized for 10 years to conceal the true nature of a plot to assassinate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the House Assassinations Committee was told Tuesday.

Instead, she was a sick woman with chronic brain damage in desperate need of treatment and care, a long list of Tennessee witnesses testified.

Author Mark Lane, Mrs. Walden's co-guardian and proponent of the conspiracy theory, angrily stormed out of the committee room at the end of the hearing day.

Before he left, Lane denounced committee members for disclosing his client's criminal record, saying they had violated federal law.

"I could not gauge the extent of this committee's cruelty in its attempt to destroy Grace Walden," he said. "She is a decent human being who you have tried to destroy in front of all America. You make me ill."

Lane's departure from the committee room left Memphis lawyer Duncan Ragsdale at the witness table to continue the attack on the committee probe.

Ragsdale and Lane are co-guardians of Mrs. Walden and advised her to refuse to answer a committee subpena Tuesday because of her "fragile" emotional condition.

The committee permitted Lane and Ragsdale to sit together at the witness table at Ragsdale's request. No sooner had Lane sat down than he began a scathing criticism of the members.

Both said they agreed not to bring Mrs. Walden from Memphis to testify after Lane had talked to Shelby County Probate Judge Joseph Evans.

Lane read a statement from Evans saying the two men could tell the committee that Mrs. Walden should not appear.

Lane also said the committee had "violated" Evans' request that her arrest record not be entered into the committee record.

Lane claims that Mrs. Walden, who resides at his home in Memphis, saw King's assassin flee from the rooming house across the street from where King was killed at the Lorraine Motel on April 4, 1968. That person, he said, is not James Earl Ray, King's confessed and convicted killer. Lane is representing Ray in an attempt to gain him a new trial.

Testimony took apart, piece by piece, contentions by Lane that Mrs. Walden was "silenced" by committing her to a mental institution.

To achieve that government plot, Lane has insisted, she was given "mind crippling" drugs at the psychiatric unit of the John Gaston Hospital in Memphis in 1968 and early 1969, and for the next nine years at Western Mental Health Institute (formerly Western State) in Bolivar, Tenn. She was released from the hospital this year and has been declared mentally incompetent by the courts.

Witnesses Tuesday included William L. Srygley of Memphis, a former Memphis city patrolman who with another officer took Mrs. Walden in 1968 to City of Memphis Hospital where she was later treated for psychiatric troubles; Dr. David Moore, the supervising psychiatrist at City of Memphis Hospital in 1968 and now chief of psychiatry at the Memphis Veterans Hospital; C. Cleveland Drennon Jr., the former assistant attorney for Shelby County who was appointed by the county probate court to serve as her guardian and counsel during commitment proceedings; Dr. James Druff, superintendent of Western State Mental Hospital from 1967 to 1969; Dr. Jack C. Neale III, who succeeded Druff, and Dr. Morris Cohen, superintendent of the institution when Mrs. Walden was released last April.

Tuesday's highlights were:

- Srygley said he and another officer took Mrs. Walden to John Gaston for treatment of a leg or ankle injury on July 8, 1968. He said they thought they would be called to return for her, but they were not. The two men were assigned to guard her former husband, Charles Stephens.
- Moore said Mrs. Walden complained at the hospital of "nerves" and was examined by a staff psychiatrist as having organic brain syndrome and suicidal tendencies. She was given "standard" dosages of drugs and kept in seclusion for her own protection. He denied giving an oral order to nurses to "notify Memphis Police Department of homicide disposition of patient and hold until dispositions made by police (contained on hospital report)." He denied any law agency had ordered him to hold her. He said he knew of no attempt to "silence" her.
- Drennon described Mrs. Walden as in "desperate" need of mental care when he served as both her guardian and lawyer in proceedings to send her to the mental institution at Bolivar.
- Druff, superintendent of Western State in 1968, said Mrs. Walden was diagnosed as having "chronic" and progressive brain damage. He said her intelligence functions had deteriorated, especially her judgment, insight and memory, partly because of alcoholism. Only once, 1975, did she show a desire to leave the hospital, he said.